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Adoption of the report of the Committee on the work of its forty-third session

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Addendum

Programme questions: proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 (item 4 (b))

Programme 23: Public information

1. At its 7th meeting, on 12 June 2003, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005.[1] It had before it proposals in respect of programme 23, Public information (A/58/90, annex).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced programme 23 and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the programme.

Discussion

3. Support was expressed for the revised operating model for the Department of Public Information, which aims to improve its ability to deliver effective and targeted information programmes. The view was expressed that the mandate of the Department is complemented by a new mission statement, which will assist the Department to operationalize the mandate. Appreciation was expressed for the usefulness of the information disseminated by the Department through the United Nations web site.

4. The view was expressed that the Secretary-General should be encouraged to expeditiously implement those elements of reform under his sole authority, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and decisions already adopted. In that regard, support was expressed for the concrete initiatives taken in

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recent months concerning the restructuring of the Department of Public Information and the improvement of the United Nations library services.

5. Significant interest was shown in the rationalization of the United Nations information centres around regional hubs. Some delegations expressed strong support for that initiative and urged that the momentum be maintained for progress in other regions. A regional hub would be created in Western Europe to replace nine country-level offices. Concern was also expressed that decisions had been taken without prior consultations with concerned Member States as stated in paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution 57/300. Doubt was expressed that the rationalization of the information centres could be implemented before the prior approval of the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005 for the Department of Public Information. The Committee was informed that that initiative had been mandated in resolution 57/300 and that the intention to proceed accordingly had been made well known. Views were expressed, however, that regionalization should not result in people in the developing countries being denied access to United Nations information. Clarification was sought on the interpretation of paragraph 15 of resolution 57/300, in which the Assembly, inter alia, "takes note of the proposal of the Secretary-General contained in action 8 of his report,[2] to rationalize the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs". The Committee was informed that the Assembly's request for a progress report on the implementation of the proposal constituted authority to proceed. That was the basis for the proposal contained in the proposed revision to the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 and the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.[3] Regionalization in Western Europe would be applied, and the objective of applying that initiative in other regions had been set out in resolution 57/300. It was indicated that there had been no discussion related to a similar arrangement in any other region.

6. With regard to the United Nations information centres, it was stated that the concept of regional hubs was a valid one from the viewpoint of improving efficiency. It was also stated that, in considering a system of regional hubs, it was important to weigh what would be lost by closing existing information centres against the merits created through the reinforced activities. In that connection, it was further stated that the overall support of a host Government should be reflected in plans to implement the proposal of the Secretary-General to rationalize the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs.

7. Concerns were also expressed, on the other hand, regarding the negative implications of the process of regionalizing the information centres for, it was stated, it could worsen the delivery of adequate information in regions, such as Latin America, where distances and difficulties in access to new technologies made the presence of information centres necessary.

8. Views were expressed that priority areas for the work of the Department should be guided by the revised medium-term plan as well as by the Millennium Declaration.

9. The view was also expressed that expected accomplishments and indicators of achievements were not well formulated, did not cover major areas of work and presented very little useful information on the outcomes. The objectives concerning improving the management of library operations and revitalizing the Publications Board should have been set out, for example. It was observed that the description of

the overall orientation of the Department omitted any reference to the progress of changes promised in the reform process, such as an evaluation of all activities. It was suggested that the responsibility of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for implementing subprogramme 3, in coordination with other United Nations libraries, should be discharged within the framework of the recommendations of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries.

10. The importance of multilingualism was stressed, and strong support was expressed for the Department's effort in that area. The importance of the dissemination of information in local languages for local populations was stressed. The view was expressed that multilingualism should be included in the indicators.

11. The view was expressed that information in local languages had the strongest impact on the local population, and that paragraph 23.11 of the proposed revisions should reflect that important element in accordance with paragraph 37 of General Assembly resolution 57/130 B.

12. It was noted that the Department intended to conduct guided tours and briefing programmes in New York, Geneva and Vienna, as outlined in paragraph 23.8 of the proposed revisions. The importance of ensuring equal treatment of public information activities in all United Nations Offices was stressed. Concerns were expressed that the Department's intentions for activities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi were not reflected in the revised medium-term plan.

13. It was noted that the efforts were made to include the provisions of General Assembly resolution 57/7 of 4 November 2002 in the revised medium-term plan, more specifically in subprogramme 1. Views were expressed that the advocacy role and public information activities in support of Africa's development should not be limited to subprogramme 1, but should also be reflected in subprogramme 2. In that context, it was suggested that the Department's efforts would be further enhanced by utilizing United Nations Radio and United Nations News, in addition to the use of quarterly publications, brochures and web-only articles.

Conclusions and recommendations

14. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session give further consideration to the proposed revisions to programme 23, Public information, of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, subject to the following modifications:**

Paragraph 23.1

Replace the first two sentences with the following: "The overarching mandate of the Department is in General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946 and its primary mission is to provide, through its outreach activities, accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to the public on the tasks and responsibilities of the United Nations in order to strengthen international support for the activities of the Organization with the greatest transparency, respecting existing mandates and in line with rules 5.6 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, to focus its message and concentrate its efforts better and, as a

function of performance management, to match its programmes with the needs of its target audiences, on the basis of improved feedback and evaluation mechanisms as set out in the General Assembly resolution 57/130 B."

In the last sentence, after the words "has been formulated", insert the words "as welcomed by the Committee on Information,".

Paragraph 23.2

In the fourth sentence, after the words "by the reform efforts of the Secretary-General," insert the following: "as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/300."

In the fifth sentence, before the words "laid down by the General Assembly", add the words "in the medium-term plan."

Paragraph 23.7

In the third sentence, after the words "around regional hubs", insert the words "where appropriate, in consultation with concerned Member States".

Paragraph 23.9

After the words "on priority issues", add the words "drawing on the broad framework set out in the medium-term plan".

Paragraph 23.10

In the second sentence, delete the words "and established by the Secretary-General".

In the last sentence, after the words "on priority issues", add the words "drawing on the broad framework set out in the medium-term plan and the Millennium Declaration, which was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/2".

In the last sentence, delete the words "as its guide".

Paragraph 23.11

Replace the second sentence with "Under the guidance of the Information Centres Service at Headquarters, the United Nations information centres and information components, and regional hubs, as applicable, will play a significant role in disseminating information about the work of the Organization to the peoples of the world, including the areas outlined in the Untied Nations Millennium Declaration, and the information centres, as the 'field voice' of the Department of Public Information, and will work through local intermediaries to promote public awareness of and mobilize support for the work of the United Nations at the local level, bearing in mind that information in the local languages has the strongest impact on the local populations."

Paragraph 23.13

After the words "communication strategies on those issues;", delete the word "and" and add the words "enhanced capacity of the Department to collaborate usefully and actively with clients to deliver the messages of the United Nations; and".

Paragraph 23.14

After the words "regional hubs", add the words "where appropriate, in consultation with concerned Member States."

Paragraph 23.15

Replace the words "the percentage of clients" with the words "the number and percentage of clients, including media and civil society,".

Paragraph 23.17

After the last sentence, add:

"The subprogramme will support the efforts of the Strategic Communications Division to strengthen the advocacy role and public information activities of the United Nations in support of Africa's development initiatives, as outlined in General Assembly resolution 57/7 of 4 November 2002".

Paragraph 23.20

After the word "strengthened", add the words "with the goal of achieving full parity among the six official languages of the United Nations and enhancing the capacity of other languages".

Paragraph 23.21

After the words "would include", add the words "(a) a high level of".

Add a comma after the words "United Nations" and replace the words "in addressing the priority issues before the Organization." with the words "drawing on the broad framework set out in the medium-term plan; and (b) the availability of all relevant information in various languages, in particular, the six official languages of the United Nations web site.".

Paragraph 23.22

After the words "would include the", insert the words "(a) number and".

Delete the period at the end of the sentence and add the following: "; and (b) the percentage of the pages of the web site available in the six official languages of the United Nations.".

Paragraph 23.24

Replace the first sentence with following: "Within the Department of Public Information, the responsibility for implementing the subprogramme lies with the Outreach Division, within which Dag Hammarskjöld Library has the

responsibility for coordination with other United Nations libraries and libraries of the wider United Nations system."

Paragraph 23.30

At the end of the paragraph, replace the words "the Millennium Declaration as a guide" with the words "the medium-term plan as a guide and taking into consideration General Assembly resolution 55/2 containing the Millennium Declaration".

15. **The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to make proposals, as a matter of priority, to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Information, in order to ensure the application of common principles and criteria for the provision of guided tours and briefing programmes at all United Nations duty stations, in order to ensure a common approach that places all duty stations on the same footing.**

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/57/6/Rev.1).

[2] See A/57/488.

[3] A/58/6 (Sect. 28).